

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 MOSCOW 19605 01 OF 02 161547Z
ACTION SS-25

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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 19605

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ASEC, BGEN, CGEN, UR, US (CRAWFORD, FRANCIS J.)
SUBJECT: CRAWFORD CASE - CURRENT SOVIET LINE

SUMMARY: USA/CANADA INSTITUTE DEPUTY DIRECTOR SHERSHNEV TOLD EMBASSY OFFICIAL AUGUST 15 THAT HE HAS BEEN INFORMED BY PERSONS WHOSE RELIABILITY HE TRUSTS THAT CRAWFORD IS GUILTY OF SERIOUS VIOLATIONS OF SOVIET CURRENCY LAW. SHERSHNEV CONCEDED THAT HE HAD NEVER SEEN THE EVIDENCE HIMSELF AND SAID HE HAD WONDERED WHAT CRAWFORD COULD HAVE DONE WITH THE RUBLES. HE HAD NEVER BEEN TOLD THERE WAS ANY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRAWFORD'S ARREST AND THAT OF SOVIET UN EMPLOYEES. WE BELIEVE SHERSHNEV'S COMMENTS REFLECT BRIEFING WHICH SOVIET AUTHORITIES HAVE GIVEN SENIOR OFFICIALS IN CONTACT WITH WESTERN BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS, WHO ARE PASSING ALONG TO THEM STATEMENTS ABOUT ALLEGEDLY CONVINCING EVIDENCE OF CRAWFORD'S "GUILT". EMBASSY OFFICIAL SAID WE TAKE VERY SERIOUS VIEW OF CRAWFORD CASE, WHICH UNLESS PROMPTLY RESOLVED CAN HAVE HIGHLY ADVERSE EFFECT ON FUTURE OF US-SOVIET ECONOMIC RELATIONS.

1. AT SPASO HOUSE RECEPTION AUGUST 15 YEVGENIY SHERSHNEV DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF USA/CANADA INSTITUTE, DREW E/C COUNSELOR ASIDE TO RAISE CRAWFORD CASE. AT OUTSET SHE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 MOSCOW 19605 01 OF 02 161547Z

SHERSHNEV ASKED IN NOTE OF INCREDULITY WHETHER ARM AND HAMMER HAD INTERVENED ON CRAWFORD'S BEHALF. WHEN COUNSELOR SAID HE UNDERSTOOD HAMMER HAD DONE SO, SHERSHNEV STATED FLATLY THAT THE EVIDENCE WAS CLEAR BEYOND ANY DOUBT THAT CRAWFORD HAD BEEN ENGAGED IN SERIOUS VIOLATION OF SOVIET CURRENCY LAWS. HE EMPHASIZED THAT SUCH VIOLATIONS ARE VIEWED WITH UTMOST GRAVITY

IN USSR AND CAN, IN SOME CIRCUMSTANCES, BRING THE DEATH PENALTY.

2. COUNSELOR RESPONDED THAT WE HAD NO REASON TO DOUBT CRAWFORD'S OWN ACCOUNT. WHEN SHERSHNEV ATTEMPTED TO CONCLUDE THAT DIFFERENCE WAS THAT WE THINK HIM INNOCENT AND THEY KNOW HE IS GUILTY, COUNSELOR NOTED THAT CIRCUMSTANCES OF ARREST WERE EXTRAORDINARY AND DISTURBING. SHERSHNEV ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE HAD, HIMSELF, NOT SEEN ANY EVIDENCE BUT HAD BEEN TOLD OF IT BY PERSONS IN WHOM HE REPOSES CONFIDENCE. HE SAID HE HAD ALSO WONDERED TO WHAT PURPOSE CRAWFORD COULD HAVE DEVOTED THE RUBLES. HE FURTHER AGREED THAT IF THE EVIDENCE WERE AS STATED, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN CUSTOMARY FOR THE USSR TO ASK THE COMPANY IN QUESTION FOR THE RECALL OF THE CULPRIT. THESE QUESTIONS HAD OCCURRED TO HIM, BUT HE HAD BEEN TOLD THE EVIDENCE AGAINST CRAWFORD IS OVERWHELMING.

3. COUNSELOR POINTED OUT THAT CRAWFORD ARREST WAS A CLEAR RETALIATION FOR THE ARREST OF SOVIET PERSONNEL IN THE UNITED STATES WHO HAD BEEN CHARGED WITH ESPIONAGE. SHERSHNEV WAS SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT HIS AUTHORITIES HAD LINKED THESE TWO CASES. HE STATED AND REPEATED THAT HE HAD NEVER BEEN TOLD OF THIS FACT DURING BRIEFINGS ON THE CRAWFORD CASE. COUNSELOR EMPHASIZED SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS WHICH THIS CASE HAS HAD FOR BUSINESS CONFIDENCE IN SOVIET

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MOSCOW 19605 01 OF 02 161547Z

UNION.

4. COMMENT: BY SOVIET STANDARDS, SHERSHNEV IS FAIR-MINDED AND OPEN TO DISCUSSION. HE IS BY ALL APPEARANCES GENUINELY WELL DISPOSED TO THE U.S. AND INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING THE U.S.-SOVIET ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIP. WHILE HE DID NOT IDENTIFY THE SOURCES OF HIS INFORMATION, IN WHOM HE SAID HE REPOSES GREAT CONFIDENCE, WE ASSUME THAT THE SAME SORT OF HIGH LEVEL BRIEFING IS BEING GIVEN TO OTHER SENIOR SOVIET OFFICIALS (E.G. ALKHIMOV) WHO ARE IN CONTACT WITH WESTERN BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS. IT IS THROUGH SUCH CHANNELS THAT INFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION CAN BE PASSED BACK TO THE U.S., UNDERMINING THE WILLINGNESS OF EVEN THOSE WELL-DISPOSED TO SUPPORT CRAWFORD'S CASE. ALTHOUGH SHERSHNEV IS PRESUMABLY READIER TO BELIEVE HIS OWN AUTHORITIES THAN SOME WESTERNERS MIGHT BE, THEY WOULD NOT BE IMMUNE TO THE SORT OF ARGUMENTATION THAT HAD APPARENTLY CONVINCED HIM OF CRAWFORD'S "GUILT." IN THIS CONTEXT, IT IS INTERESTING THAT THE SOVIET BRIEFERS HAVE APPARENTLY NEGLECTED TO TELL THEIR AUDIENCE THAT THE CRAWFORD ARREST WAS LINKED TO THE NEW JERSEY ESPIONAGE

CASE, SINCE SUCH AN ADMISSION - JUDGING BY SHERSHNEV'S REACTION TO THE NEWS - COULD GO FAR TOWARDS UNDERMINING THE SOVIET CASE.

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PAGE 01 MOSCOW 19605 02 OF 02 161603Z
ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 MOSCOW 19605

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5. WE WILL, OF COURSE, CONTINUE TO TRY TO KEEP THE DISCUSSION AWAY FROM CRAWFORD'S GUILTY OR INNOCENCE - OTHER THAN TO SAY WE HAVE NO CAUSE TO DOUBT HIS WORD - AND TO EMPHASIZE THAT THE FORM AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS ARREST AROUSE THE GREATEST MISGIVINGS AND HAVE ALREADY GREATLY UNDERMINED BUSINESS CONFIDENCE IN THE SOVIET UNION. WE THINK IT OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE THAT TOP SOVIET OFFICIALS KEEP GETTING THE WORD AT EVERY LEGITIMATE OPPORTUNITY THAT IMPRISONMENT OF CRAWFORD WOULD HAVE SERIOUSLY ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES. TOON

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